

made a U-turn and pulled into a parking lot, with Ed screaming, “That’s them!” However, the only car in the lot was a black Chevy truck.

I asked Ed, “What the h\$## are you talking about? Those aren’t the guys.”

He wouldn’t listen to me, though. We all subsequently piled out of the Thunderbird, and Ed started in on one innocent guy standing by the Chevy. This guy gave it right back to Ed, and that’s when Kevin, a massive Sailor who could knock a man through a bulkhead, got between them. Seconds later, the man Ed had cornered brandished the pistol and pointed it right at Kevin’s forehead.

I couldn’t believe Ed was insisting the pistol wasn’t real. When it went off, and Kevin hit the ground, the two men jumped in their truck and sped away. A sigh of relief swept over us when Kevin rose to his feet. His face was covered with specks of blood—signs of powder burns. Luckily, the man had fired a blank, and, although Kevin was hurt, he was far from dead.

So how did I get myself in this situation? I assure you alcohol wasn’t a factor. The problem was that I didn’t keep Ed in check. I failed to admit that, like the guys in the Ford LTD, he, too, was looking for a fight. I lacked the courage and commitment to keep him on a leash.

We often wish our Sailors had a little more appreciation for the buddy system. If I had to do it all over again, Ed never would have come with us. He was in a self-destructive mood, and he didn’t care whom he took down with him. Sometimes we have to come to terms with Sailors like Ed; it’s either them or us—that’s the cold, hard truth. Trying to empower our junior Sailors to get help for this type of shipmate is a constant battle. Encouraging them to be more selective about the company they keep also is difficult.

We have to take the first step in the buddy program and ask ourselves, “Is this my buddy? Can I trust him?” I know that now. I’m just glad it didn’t take the loss of a friend’s life for me to learn that lesson. ➡

Hiking Submariner Survives 300-Foot Fall

By JOC(SW/AW) David Rush,
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On Dec. 23, YN2 Ben Warren of USS *Chicago* (SSN-721) and three friends set out to climb the ridge of Oahu’s Pali Lookout. He had no idea that his life was about to change.

The foursome headed out from their barracks on board Naval Station, Pearl Harbor, with a few backpacks carrying clothes, water, sandwiches, and a cell phone. After arriving at the lookout and scaling a relatively easy section, two of Warren’s friends decided they had climbed high enough—the steep terrain that towered above them seemed too difficult.

The athletic, 6-foot, 220-pound, 23-year-old Warren, however, along with another Sailor, continued the treacherous, nearly vertical free climb, with no ropes or hiking gear. About 20 feet away

from the summit, they said to each other, “This is crazy; we shouldn’t have done this. How are we going to get back down?” [*With ORM, you’re not left up a cliff without a rope. Use these principles before you engage in any on- or off-duty ventures.—Ed.*]

They decided to abort the remainder of the climb and go back down the steep mountainside. Warren was above his friend, gripping onto a rock while contemplating his next move, when, suddenly, the rock he was clinging to gave way. He began freefalling hopelessly, nearly taking his friend with him on the way down. With nothing to slow him, he picked up speed until, about 100 feet into his fall, he hit a small tree, which he split in two with his hip. He continued his harrowing descent, all the while with his life flashing before him.

When Warren first opened his eyes, he thought he heard water, “but it was blood pouring out of my head,” he explained.

“When I first started falling, I just yelled, ‘God save me,’” said Warren. “I was dead as far as I was concerned.”

Not wanting to go out this way, though, Warren summoned his inner strength and devotion to survive this perilous fall. According to him, he tried to control his descent. “When I hit the last tree, I was going out of control. I was looking down at what would be my landing spot, and it was solid rock. I thought, ‘Oh, no; I’m dead.’ Right before I hit, I tried to roll and landed on my left side,” said Warren.

Impact with the ground left Warren unconscious for about five minutes and ripped off a section of his ear. As he lay there, his friends gathered more than 100 feet above. When Warren first opened his eyes, he thought he heard water, “but it was blood pouring out of my head,” he explained. “My friends thought I was dead and called 911. They couldn’t see me or reach me, so I knew I had to climb to where they were before I bled to death. I heard them telling me a helicopter was coming and asking if I could move. I told them to keep calling me because I couldn’t see them—I was in a lot of bushes,” he added.

After Warren reached his friends, a fire-department helicopter arrived and took him to the Pali Lookout parking lot, where an ambulance sped him to Queen’s Medical Center. Doctors there discovered Warren had suffered compression fractures of his C7 and C8 vertebrae in his spinal column, in addition to having lost 25 percent of his left ear. His left knee and right shoulder also were bothering him. Warren spent three days in the hospital and left with a neck brace and more than 20 stitches in his ear.



YN2 Ben Warren

As for why or how he survived his ordeal, Warren credits the intervention of a higher power. “I’m in shape, but that’s not what kept me alive. The only reason I’m living today is because of God. I asked Him to save me as I was falling like a skydiver. My head broke my fall, but my skull didn’t even fracture,” pointed out Warren.

Having learned from his experience, Warren recommends that anyone who plans to hike use the proper equipment. “It’s a beautiful view, but you can get hurt,” he cautioned.

Friends and shipmates, including his commanding officer, poured into the hospital to wish Warren well while he was recovering. Did he mind it was the holiday season? Not hardly. In his words, “It was the best Christmas I ever had.” ➡